1963 (Nov.) Ross Dowson - CBC interview on JFK Assassination

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CBC host: There is some doubt about the man accused of assassinating President Kennedy. He didn't seem to find what he wanted on either side of the Iron Curtain. He was said to be a member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and to have strong Trotskyite or Trotskyist leanings. Whether this had anything to do with the assassination may never be known. The man is dead. But to shed some light on the subject, we have a well-known Torontonian who has been associated with both movements - Ross Dowson, former candidate for Mayor of the City of Toronto. Mr. Dowson, within the leftist movement, what differentiates a Trotskyite or Trotskyist from other elements in the same camp?

Dowson: Well, the Trotskyists are socialists. But to paraphrase one person's evaluation of the Bolshevik current as distinct from the Menshevik current in the Russian Revolution days, he said that the Bolsheviks are socialists who mean what they say. I would say the Trotskyists are socialists who **mean** what they say - who are dead serious about the necessity for a socialist solution of the problems confronting the Canadian people.

CBC: What separates (you) then from the kind of socialism that we find in Russia at the present time? I understand there is some argument between the present Soviet attitude and the Trotskyite attitude.

Dowson: Well, in the Soviet Union today they do not have socialism. What they have is the economic foundations *(of socialism)*. These foundations were laid down by the Russian Revolution in 1917 - the nationalized property relations, the monopoly of foreign trade. It's upon these foundations that socialism can be built. But they do not have socialism. Socialism presupposes a higher productivity, a higher living standard, a higher economic welfare for the mass of the population, than capitalism. So they have only got the foundations upon which they can develop in a socialist direction.

CBC: Could you tell us a bit about the Fair Play for Cuba organization?

Dowson: Well, I'm a member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. This is an organization whose aim is very clear; its purpose is to disseminate information about the struggles of the Cuban people; it generally takes the position that the Cuban people should have an opportunity, free from threats of aggression and terror, to develop the economy and their society as they see fit. I'm a member of (Fair Play), as are many other persons and other tendencies of the Left, and even persons of what is traditionally called the "right." There are persons who are supporters of the Liberal Party in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. They all have equal rights - they have no privileges; it's a broad organization based on simple purposes. I joined it I might say at a mass meeting which was held in a Unitarian Church, at which Professor Leslie Dewart spoke, who is a theologian, a professor at St. Michael's College, and they recruited persons who wanted to identify themselves with the Committee at that time. I attend the meetings - unfortunately I am not a very active participant because I have many other matters of concern and interest to me. I support its cause.

CBC: Then its safe to say that the Fair Play for Cuba Committee is not composed solely of left-wing people.

Dowson: Oh no, not at all. It doesn't differentiate; it doesn't have any political screen. This is I think one of its great merits. There was an attempt by some persons to impose some kind of loyalty oath upon the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, but this was intelligently and correctly in my opinion, rejected by the membership, and it has no screening process at all and it is open to persons who wish to participate in its declared objectives. There are persons who are not in the orthodox meaning of the word "leftists" at all.

CBC: How about Lee Harvey Oswald? I think we can assume correctly that he was a Trotskyite and a member of the Fair Play for Cuba organization. How do you account for the situation down there? Do you feel he was incorrectly charged? Or, what is your opinion on that?

As with the bulk of European public opinion, we are extremely sceptical of the guilt of Lee Harvey Oswald

Dowson: Well, I don't think we can assume that he was a Trotskyist at all. If he was the assassin, I would say now, I would like to make it very clear - he is not a Trotskyist, because Trotskyists reject this type of political action - completely - out of hand. That he is a member of Fair Play? I do not know that, either. He is alleged to be a member, but the official leadership of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee say that he is unknown to them in the United States - that he was not a secretary of the Committee in Fort Worth or Dallas I think he said, or New Orleans. I don't think we know what Lee Oswald was. I am anticipating a profound research into the whole case, but I would say this - but maybe you would like to further the question

CBC: Well I understand you have some ideas with regard to an erroneous charge or the possibility that Lee Oswald himself did not actually shoot the president - that it was somebody else.

Dowson: Yes, I am extremely sceptical about all of the information that has been presented to the Canadian public by the press. That's been leaked by the Dallas authorities and by the FBI. And in this I do not have any unique views; as a matter of fact that's the opinion of particularly the European press. For instance, Representative Charles Goodall read into the Congressional Record a report that appeared in the **Washington Post**, and they had made a survey of opinion in France. 33% of the French pubic interviewed believed that President Kennedy was murdered by a racist organization - by the extreme Right. And more significantly I might add, over half of the French public believe that Ruby shot Oswald to stop the investigation of the crime. I would say that this is the general opinion of persons throughout the European continent, and I share that opinion. I believe that any serious investigation of evidence that has been presented is entirely circumstantial against Oswald. It shows that it just doesn't jibe.

And, I would have to say first that I do not know whether Oswald is guilty, or not. I do not know who he is or what he is, but my thinking goes along two channels on the basis of the information now available to us. Either he is a person who has been framed of the whole cloth, that the Dallas police did not get anybody; or they did get somebody and they are covering this person up. Or, I would say that he might be a provocateur, who has been planted by the Right. You see I think there is considerable justice in world public opinion saying that he - President Kennedy - was murdered by a racist, outside of the concrete evidence, because you don't have to know who pulled the trigger in a crime, you have to know the objective conditions, and the circumstances that make such a thing inevitable. Mr. Kennedy, when he moved into Dallas, was taking his life in his hands, because of the situation in Dallas. I think that the **(Toronto Daily) Star** and other papers have given us a picture of the hysteria, the race hatred, the bitterness against Catholics which Mr. Kennedy was, the bigotry and authority of the bigotry in Dallas; that one has to say that the situation was set up, and you don't have to know really who pulled the trigger to know who's guilty. I would say the racists in the Deep South, the Southern Bourbons, the heads of the Democratic Party, that's who's guilty.

CBC: Do you think the Left had anything to gain in the death of President Kennedy?

Dowson: Not at all. Since the assassination, of course, the new President, President Johnson, has made some statements on his policy. And it's apparent that on all the major questions that he has spoken on, and made enunciations of a policy character, that he is going to carry the identical line of the late President Kennedy. Is this not proof that nothing has been gained at all by anybody who thought there was something to be gained by the assassination? This affirms the traditional and orthodox Marxist opinion *(on assassinations -ed.)* You see, I was a political opponent of Mr. Kennedy, not a personal opponent - just as I was a political opponent of Mr. Phillips for the Mayoralty (of Toronto); I was not

concerned about his personal life; I had no personal animosity against him as an individual; I was opposed to the political views of Mr. Phillips and I am opposed to the political positions of Mr. Kennedy - the whole policy of the government - that's what I am opposed to. And this cannot be changed by the removal of an individual, by the removal of Kennedy. And now the resumption of office by Mr. Johnson and the statements of Mr. Johnson that he is going to carry on the same policies, so correctly affirm it.

CBC: How do you feel that the possibility that Lee Harvey Oswald was indeed a sick man - and whether he happened to be a Trotskyite, or whether he happened to be a Stalinist, or whether he happened to be a tool of the extreme Right, has precious little bearing on the situation. It seems that Lee Oswald went to the Soviet Union and didn't seem to find his niche there; he came back to the United States and apparently didn't find his niche there, because he apparently applied in Mexico City for a visa back to the Soviet Union and was rejected. Do you think there is a possibility that he was just an individual acting on his own volition, and that what he did has precious little bearing on whatever political, religious or social camp he might find himself.

Dowson: Well, the fact that Lee Oswald went to the Soviet Union and became dissatisfied with the situation in the Soviet Union doesn't suggest to me in any way that he is an unstable or deranged person. While I support - I am a defender of the Soviet Union against capitalism, and I consider the economic material conditions that were achieved by the October Revolution progressive, I am in complete disagreement with the Khrushchev administration; and if I went there, I know in advance now that I would be extremely dissatisfied with the present situation in the Soviet Union. Mr. Oswald has never recorded as to the basis of his dissatisfaction. Perhaps he disagreed with the considerable privileged strata that exists in the Soviet Union, the extreme contrast in wealth with exists in the Soviet Union, which is a negation of socialism. Perhaps he also was opposed to the one-party rule in the Soviet Union, which I also am opposed to. I believe that all parties that are based on a defence of the property relations established by the Revolution should be allowed to exist openly and should contend for political support of the Soviet people. So that doesn't make him a screwball or an unstable person. The fact that he wanted to go back to the Soviet Union after living for some time in Dallas - that doesn't show to me either, that he's a unstable person, because while I have never been in the Deep South, I have read many reports of the situation in the Deep South and I know that the Negro people as a totality, as a whole, live in constant fear of their life in the Deep South, because the administration of the towns and communities is racist to the core. The FBI itself has not been able to get any evidence on the bombing of six children who were killed in Birmingham, a modern city. There have been fifty bombings taken place there and they haven't got one bomber; so the fact that a person is dissatisfied with life in the Deep South doesn't prove he is unstable either.

The endemic racism of the US deep south is guilty of assassination

CBC: Would you consider though that Texas really constitutes a part of the Deep South; I understand that race relations in Texas are certainly not nearly as bad as they are in, say Alabama, Mississippi or Louisiana, Georgia and the states in that particular area.

Dowson: Well I would have to say that my knowledge as to the relative situation state by state in the South is not adequate for me to express an opinion, but by merely reading various letters that have appeared in the press in Canada here, in the big dailies, I would say that it is not qualitatively different. For instance, Walker, General Walker, lives in Dallas, and from an examination of the conduct of the investigation in Oswald's case, for instance from witnessing with my own eyes over TV the assassination of Oswald, I would say there's very little difference - was that not a scandal, the assassination of Oswald? Did we not see the police actually open the door for his assassination? I think it is reasonable for us to all believe, or at least have some conviction, that Oswald was murdered by the Dallas police. At least we would have to say they opened the door; he was murdered by invitation. So I can't see that the situation in Dallas is qualitatively different at any rate from any other area in the Deep South.

CBC: The Trotskyite camp - back to politics for a moment - has been accused of representing on the Left what the John Birchers represent on the Right, a kind of extremist position. Is this a fair assumption?

Dowson: Well I would say that the positions of the Right are irrational - they're hysterical. They are based on prejudice and ignorance. The positions of the Trotskyists are based on what we consider to be a scientific analysis of what we consider to be the objective reality before us. So, they're quite different. Now, there is some element of validity in the statement. We are on what people call the extreme Left; the Birchers are on the extreme Right. First, I believe the extreme Left I believe is scientific, it's humanist; its aims are in the interests of the overall community, it's scientific. But there is this merit - in my opinion, the two serious forces in society today, as we approach a showdown in social relations, **are** the socialists versus the fascists. That was the situation in Germany in 1933. The polar opposites were the choices before humanity; whether Germany was going to go socialist, or was going to go fascist. We are approaching that situation in America, in my opinion. Is America going to go fascist - that's the direction of the Birchites, or is it going to go socialist - that's the position of the Trotskyists.

CBC: Within this situation, I understand that the Trotskyite position is that war is inevitable. Is this true?

Dowson: Oh no, not at all. We believe that war is inevitable as long as, insofar as capitalism continues to exist. We believe that war, imperialist war, is an integral part of capitalism, but we're not convinced of the continuity of capitalism at all; we're convinced that capitalism is going to leave the scene, is going to be replaced by a socialist society. We look upon the coming of the Third World War with abhorrence, with great fear, because I can't visualize this Third World War, which will be an H-bomb war, which will escalate into an H-Bomb war; I can't see civilization coming out of it.

CBC: Does Mao Tse-Tung follow a Trotskyist view?

Dowson: I would say that the views that I have expressed are in general the views of the Communist Party of China, although their views have been distorted with a certain basis of justification because on occasion they have suggested that they look upon the coming Third World War without too much fear, and so they have given credence to the misinterpretation of their position, and this lie - the complete fabrication particularly by Khrushchev that they want war - they do not; their position is generally the orthodox Marxist position which is the Trotskyist position.

CBC: Did not Marx himself state that there was an internal or civil war, inevitable between capital and labor?

Dowson: Well, we have this war now. It is what Marx would call "the class struggle." It sometimes works on the level of a "civil war" - but it's now existing on - as you say - not a "hot" basis. There is a class struggle - for instance, why do the unions exist in Canada, if there is no conflict between labor and capital? The unions would not exist; they would have no social function. Why does the New Democratic Party exist? Mr. Douglas' comments notwithstanding, it exists because there is an irreconcilable conflict between the Liberals and Tories, which are parties of Big Business, and the third party, which is the New Democratic Party, which is based on the labor movement. So we have this phenomenon which Marx called the class struggle, the class conflict. The Marxists, the socialists, are opposed to this conflict. We hope to eliminate it by establishing a social and economic system whereby the majority will rule who are the working class, who will establish their state power, and as Engels predicted, this state power will gradually wither away into the administration of things. We would eliminate the class conflict in society which is based on the fact that a few persons who we call capitalists, own the means of production, and the great masses of the population are merely hands who depend upon for their living, their economic conditions and welfare, on their ability to get jobs thanks to the dynamics of the system which is controlled by the capitalists. We want the means of production to belong to the people, because these are social means of production.

Trotskyists are not "fundamentalists" - for us, Marxism is a science

CBC: With regard to Marxism, again, one more question: I understand that the Marxist camps are divided, calling each other revisionists, as such, and that each group feels that it has a sort of corner on genuine Marxism. Does this not smack to a degree, of the fundamentalist attitude in regard to Christianity, in which the Bible becomes, or is treated as **the** word of God, or the ultimate analysis of the situation? Is it not true that Marxist groups seem to treat practically

every statement made by Marx as being the ultimate in wisdom?

Dowson: Well, some do. The Marxism movement has its, what you might call, fundamentalists. The Trotskyists are not Marxist fundamentalists. You see, the Bible is presented as the word of God, and therefore it becomes a matter of great contention among persons who believe in God, who accept the concept of God. I recognize, and the movement recognizes Marx as a man, and as fallible, capable of making errors. Furthermore, the world has changed since Marx, in some aspects. So Marxism is a living science. And this is where the dispute comes in. We naturally would look back to Marx to see how Marx interpreted the situation, but as scientists we would also be open to an evaluation of whatever possible changes in objective reality there are and we would be testing the Marxist method. So this is where the difference comes in, and of course there is a big dispute in what persons call the Marxist movement. For instance Mao Tse-Tung of the Communist Party of China, is challenging Khrushchev as a revisionist of Marxism. I believe that the Chinese are on perfectly solid grounds, and as a matter of fact they are saying what the Trotskyists said twenty, thirty years ago. They are now evaluating the whole experience that they went through. And we have been (evaluating our position) - the Trotskyist movement, and it arose out of the continuity of the struggle to develop Leninism, which is one stage of Marxism. We are convinced that Stalinism was a revisionist current in Marxism, and that it reflected the needs of the Soviet bureaucracy, and not the needs of the world socialist struggle. And the Trotskyists - we are Marxists - we have attempted to keep Marxism up to date, vigorous and virile, as a science. So here there is no element of dogmatism, you see - no element of fundamentalism. We are orthodox Marxists because we believe the main tenets of Marxism are valid, are completely valid, because we are still in the period of capitalism.

CBC: You would still believe in the economic interpretation of history, would you?

Dowson: Well, this is a way that Marxist views are sometimes presented, that he was an economic determinist. This is a slight distortion of Marx's views; Marx said that that the main factor in understanding society is the economic factor - the main factor; he didn't say that this excluded all others. And of course you must take into consideration the question of culture, national tradition, etc. Yes, I uphold the basic concept of Marxism. I believe it is the most perfect tool from a sociological point of view that mankind has yet devised. In this I share the opinion of many persons, who are moving in this direction. For instance, C. Wright Mills, the eminent American sociologist, was moving in this direction just prior to his death. He had discarded the liberal ethic, the whole liberal concept, the capitalist liberal concept, and he was in moving in the direction of testing Marxism, and he considered, and I would say that a great many sociologists today consider that Marxism, if not having all the answers, is the most valid (concept.) I believe this is true.

CBC: Thank you very much. We have been talking today to Mr. Ross Dowson, former candidate for the position of Mayor in the City of Toronto.

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